




Libraries for the Future

An International Perspective

Hellen Niegaard

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At the beginning of the 21st century the concept of the library is shifting in focus – from collections to connections/communication and from storage to access in order better to respond to challenges posed by an increasingly digitised and networked information-based society. Changes which are calling either for the creation of new buildings or rethinking existing library buildings.

Introduction

What does it take to create the modern library building of tomorrow? Nobody seems to have all the answers to that question but one thing is certain – all library stakeholders, public authorities and universities, will have to re-evaluate not only their services but also their library buildings to ensure effectiveness and a sustainable library service.

1
The
changing library
environment

The library as a building is together with the city hall, the school and the hospital, considered one of society's central and basic public spaces. A building synonymous with knowledge and access to knowledge from the very beginning of time, the library is closely associated with wisdom and with mixing with one's peers. Positive aspects valued throughout history and previously associated with powerful institutions such as the state, the church, monasteries and universities to name a few.

Future libraries should of course build on this brand/reputation and heritage but need also to reflect ongoing societal and technological developments.

Globalisation of information and communication technology have changed the classic library and its building, so familiar to users of both public and academic libraries over the past 100 years, forever. The change in media formats and the breakthrough of ICT (information and communication technologies) including access to online library and information services 24/7 (24-hour and 7-day), have, together with the automation of manual handling and the emergence of extended self service points and sorting robots,

made it essential to change the way libraries are organised and layouted. These changes encompass public and academic as well as school libraries – or indeed any kind of library.

2 In the last hundred years the industrialised democratic society opened libraries up and introduced them at a local level as places of enlightenment supporting access to knowledge and providing reading for all. Even at the end of the 20th century this trend has continued at a national level with national libraries in France ‘La Très Grande Bibliothèque de France (TGBF), Tolbiac’, in Denmark ‘The Black Diamond of the Royal Library’ and in the United Kingdom ‘The British Library at St. Pancras’ all opening up to the general public in an attempt to promote a much broader access to cultural heritage as well as access to specialised and scientific information for all members of society not just for researchers and students.

However whether public or academic library we now see a new and important change in focus: from collections to users. Books and other printed/physical materials are still available in the new library but shelving no longer dominates the premises. Users and user facilities do.

And the keywords for providing updated and future-oriented library service today are: Access, Space and the Library as a place. A place promoting:

- Meetings,
- New insight, learning and understanding,
- Concentration,
- Contemplation,
- Cultural experiences,
- Access to and awareness of cultural heritage.

Service concepts are equally being developed. Before starting building projects or re-design-programmes libraries should therefore rethink their service concept(s). How does it meet needs of today? Current service concepts are for example the following of which the three first relate to both academic and public libraries and the rest only to the latter:

- Information and learning centres,
- Study and research,
- Cultural hub and meeting place in a diverse environment,
- Community Centres and Idea Stores (UK Library Learning and Information places),
- Information literacy – traditional literacy centres,
- Democracy development – bridging the accelerating gap between citizens and stimulating citizenship,
- Citizens’ Services (City Hall Services).

There are no simple standard solutions available for transforming a traditional collection-based book library into the library of the 21st century. The trend globally is simple: to rethink the interior of the physical library including its “face-to-face services” in conjunction with the increasing range of digital services and create new public meeting and learning places for a fast developing e-society.

Speaking of the library design and layout, what should in any case be considered?

Recent Danish surveys point out that half of the users do not come to borrow material but to use the library as a local community place of refuge: a place for information, inspiration and work. A library focusing much more on the professional face-to-face service than ever before together with a strong and more conscious communication of the growing amount of digital resources. The main requirements are innovation and space. Both the library on the net and physical library architecture and layout are undergoing intensive change and have to be redeveloped into a modern holistic library service.

Today's library functions as the citizens' 'house of the town' or as the campus' 'pivotal point' – a local meeting place providing opportunities for inspiration, dialogue, contemplation and study. Activities are available in several zones. From the lively lounge with café and exhibitions and facilities that support activities such as conferences, concerts and theatre via information desks and large work and reading rooms to study rooms/cells.

Naturally these buildings offer state-of-the-art ICT facilities. And not least an Online Zone. The latter will offer general information and guidance, search in local and national catalogues, individual and self-service like reservations and MY-Library functions, e-learning facilities and access to a variety of net-library services such as <http://www.biblioteksvagten.dk>¹ (online reference service).

An important new dimension in relation to the library's special universe – as a place of knowledge, culture, learning, insight and experience – is library development towards a kind of experimentarium. With the help of new forms of media and communication and computing technology, a completely new space is being created in the physical library.

Libraries are working together with architects, designers, ICT-developers and artists in order to expand the known universe and create space and room for instance for new interactive experiences around traditional and ICT-literacy. Space, where the individual actively meets with the ultra-modern and/or cultural heritage. Space and facilities that stimulate personal experience and play with arts, information and knowledge as a new way to personal learning and enlightenment. The tendency is a clear continuation of society's growing interest in experience-economy and learning through creativity and reflects the individualistic approach which is characteristic for society today. In front are Århus Public Libraries, Denmark, testing various interactive features including pervasive computing possibilities e. g. an information floor.

¹ <http://www.biblioteksvagten.dk/english/index.asp>.

2.1 Zones and activities

2.2 A different library universe

A current Danish example is Hjørring new main library – see the following. Another and similar trend is being seen in the Cerritos Public Library in California which offers a user-centric service. The new Cerritos library features themed physical areas, with layers of information of different types and formats in every space, and interactive services. Modern technology has been incorporated throughout the new library and users love it.

Libraries without books are another upcoming trend. CBS Porcelaenshaven, a campus library and the first without books in Denmark, ushers in a new epoch of library service and design. Porcelaenshaven is a branch of CBS Library, an institutional library serving scholarly research and educational purposes at the Copenhagen Business School. The branch, opened in 2006, offers students, researchers and the public all library facilities needed except for borrowing books and printed materials though you may use the library to pick up books ordered from other libraries.

3 Library buildings – new architectural icons

Library architecture of the 20th century went from the memorable designs of, for example, the Carnegie libraries in the UK and USA and the Erik Gunnar Asplund Main Library (1928) in Stockholm, Sweden, to an almost discreet library architecture putting functionality above all else. After decades of less striking architecture, another trend is gaining influence.

Library buildings have lately gained a much higher profile, and therefore marketing value, for both their exteriors and interiors after many decades of bland design and self-effacing shapes and colours. Increasingly the buildings of both academic, main/central libraries and branches are achieving a more iconic stature. New library buildings looking like sculptures seem to attract broad attention and admiration. Unique architectural rooms are no longer reserved just for the elite or well-to-do communities. Design, fantasy, and the use of light and materials combined with new technology create new architectural attractions, often of international quality and standing. The library building, with its focus on culture and knowledge, adds status and identity to a local community or university.

Libraries are now in many cases being designed as icons in their local communities. Recent public library examples are in the US the Seattle Central Library as well as Cerritos Public Library plus the Vienna City Library, Austria, and for university libraries there are for instance the libraries of Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands, and the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus, Germany. Danish examples would be Kulturøen, Middelfart, and the Black Diamond – the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

Finally, trends shared with most other public buildings include the creation of sustainable green library buildings and ones facilitating access for disadvantaged groups.

4 The road to successful future libraries

New library building projects are emerging in growing numbers in many countries, and certainly in all of Scandinavia, and they are trying to respond to the needs of the new era and the library of tomorrow. Not an easy task as a number of new buildings in recent years have shown. The major barrier seems to be an adherence to traditional thinking and a lack of awareness as to what constitutes a future-oriented library.

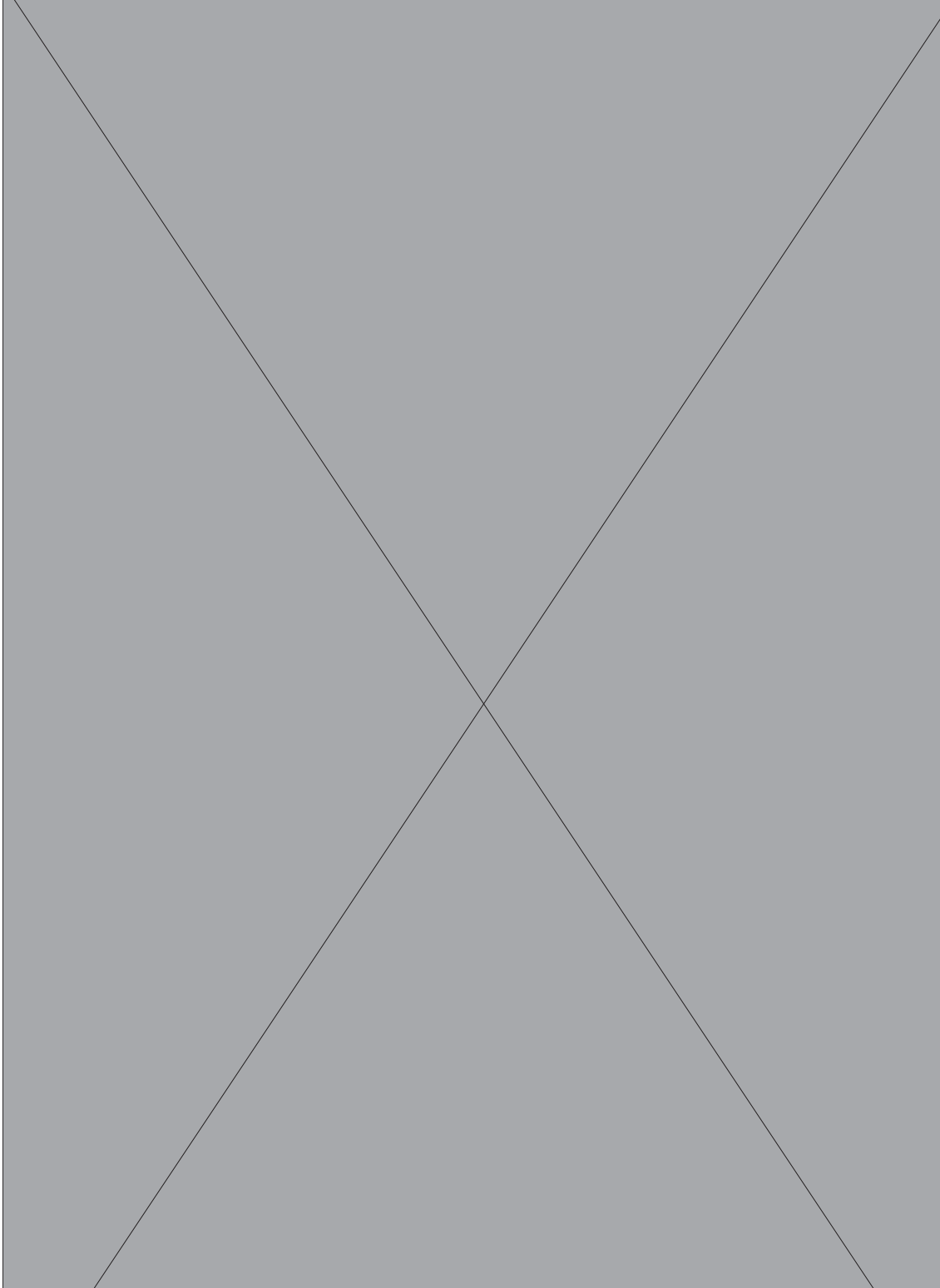


Photo 1: Seattle Central Library, photo: ÅKB.

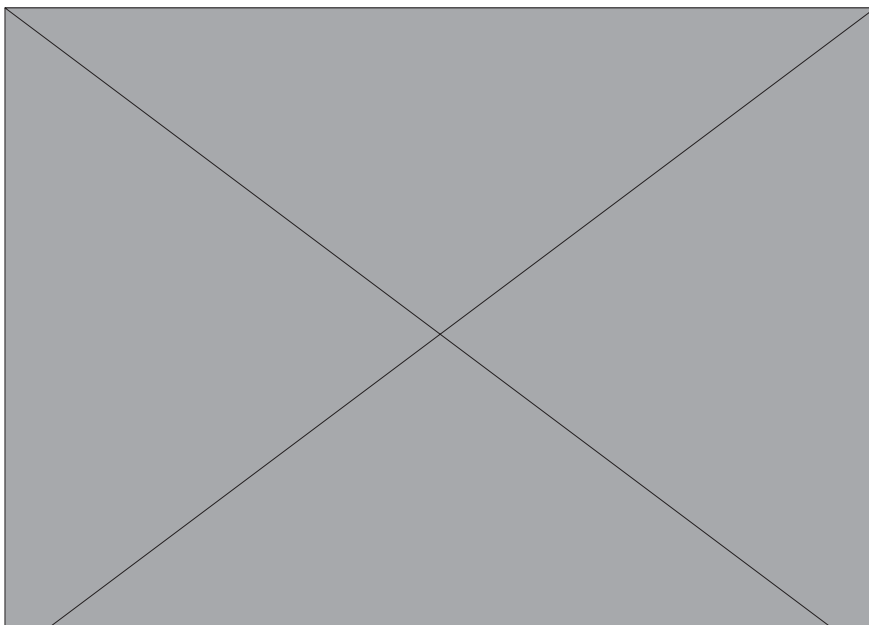


Photo 2: Space for users and user activities – a top priority of modern buildings, Seattle, photo: ÅKB.



Photo 3: The Black Diamond: The Royal Library, photo: K. Bundgaard.

Somehow library managers, planners and architects seem fixated on the classic book-dominated library and have great problems in redefining libraries for the electronic age.

Rem Koolhaas, Office of Metropolitan Architects (OMA), the architect behind one of the world's newer famous library buildings, Seattle Central Library (2004), notes that

As new media emerge and gain currency – the library seems threatened. The library stands exposed as outdated – at a moment when free access to knowledge is crucial. The library is no longer exclusively dedicated to the book and must change. From a book-fortress to a local community centre with lots of activities – all giving access to information and culture!²

In order to ensure a truly updated physical library, a framework for an efficient and future-oriented library service, it is highly recommended that a detailed analysis of the context within which the library will have to operate in the near future and on a long-term basis be carried out. A strategy – devised for updating the physical library as well as for implementing the new services – should also be developed. Both tasks must be carried out before an actual building process begins so that you will have the optimal basis for investigating the need for space.

The Royal Library in Copenhagen is designed by the architects Schmidt, Hammer and Lassen. They transformed the Royal Library into one of the world's most interesting modern national library buildings. The name refers to the building's prismatic sharp edges, its black marble plates and glass that reflects the water of the harbour. The building contains not only traditional library functions but also a concert hall, exhibition galleries, bookshop, café and restaurant. The idea: A national library not only for researchers and students etc. but also a national heritage library for the broad public. Extent: 21,000 m². [4]

5
Future-oriented
libraries
5.1
The Black Dia-
mond, The Royal
Library (1999)

Solbjerg Plads/Copenhagen Business School (2000) is designed by Vilhelm Lauritzen Architects. Layout and design key words are easy access, great oversight and flexibility: Collections are downstairs, users everywhere else. The focus is on users meeting, staying and working in the library rather than on books and collections, these are situated in the basement areas. Extent: 3,500 m². [5]

5.2
CBS Library,
a library
without walls

This library, designed by the architect Jan Amby (AK83), is from a Danish point of view on the cutting edge in terms of 'a user-centred library design and layout', which in the open-plan library consist of a number of zone-activities around a high-ceiled central hall and the combined attractive entrance and lounge area. Extent: 4,800 m². [6]

5.3
Næstved Main
Library (2004)

2 Latimer & Niegaard 2007, p. 7.



Photo 4: CBS Library, photo: CBS/J. Boserup.

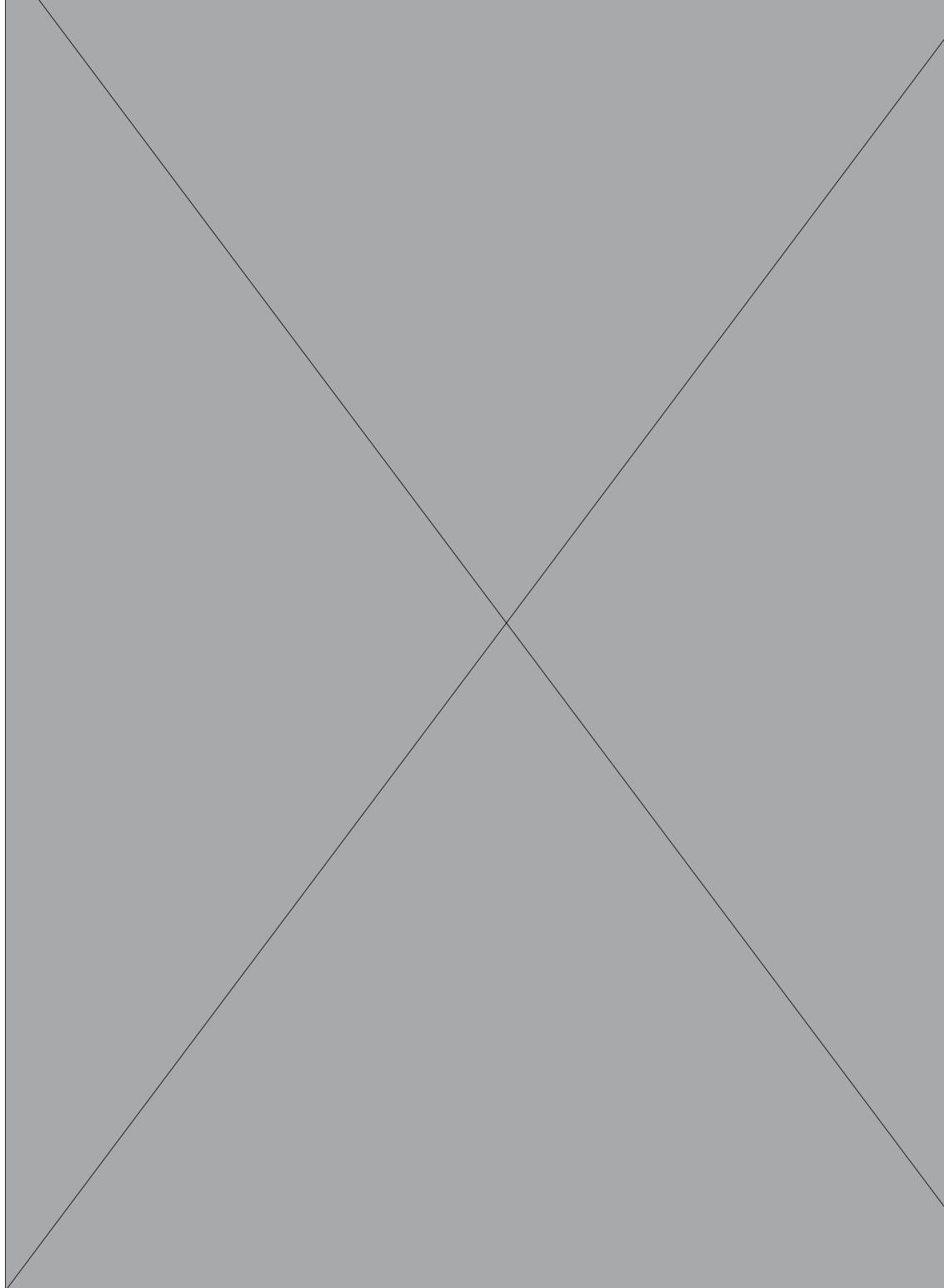


Photo 5: Næstved Main Library, photo: H. Niegaard.

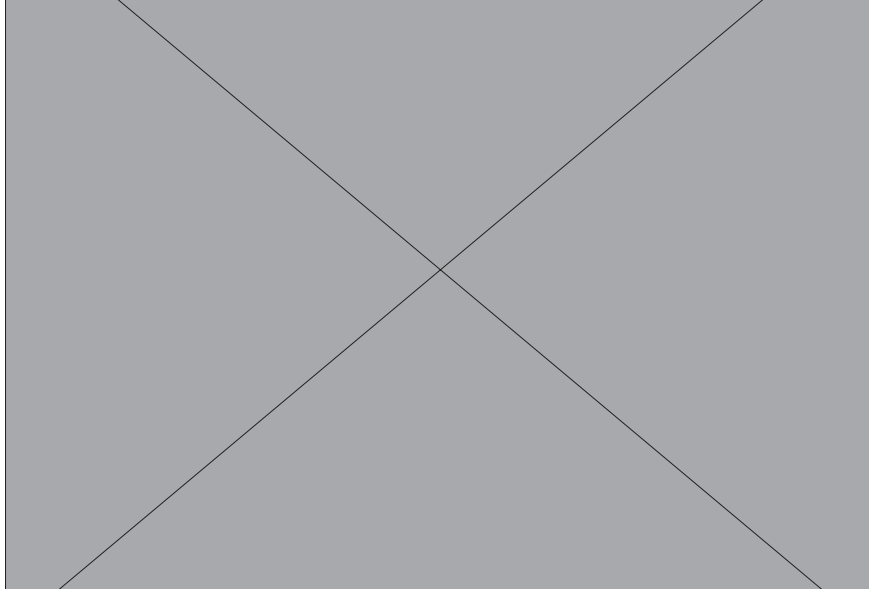


Photo 6: Nærum Gymnasium Library, photo: M. Stenbæk.

5.4 Nærum Gymnasium Library, designed by the architects Dall & Lindhardt, is an extraordinary and iconic library structure located within the main hall of Nærum's new super high-tech gymnasium. [7]

5.5 Middelfart Public Library – Kulturøen (2005) This Library is designed by the architects Schmidt, Hammer and Lassen and represents one of the few truly sculptural iconic library buildings in Denmark so far. It houses a broad partnership of cultural activities: main library (extent: 3,000 m²), tourist office, cinema, café and restaurant, and is located near the city centre and the marina. [8]

5.6 Kolding Public Library (2006) Kolding Public Library is designed by Arkitema Architects. A new model of the more classic and minimalistic library. Nevertheless, it offers lots of spaces for the users. Though 'Facts' and 'Fiction' are dominated by shelving, the presentation including plas-

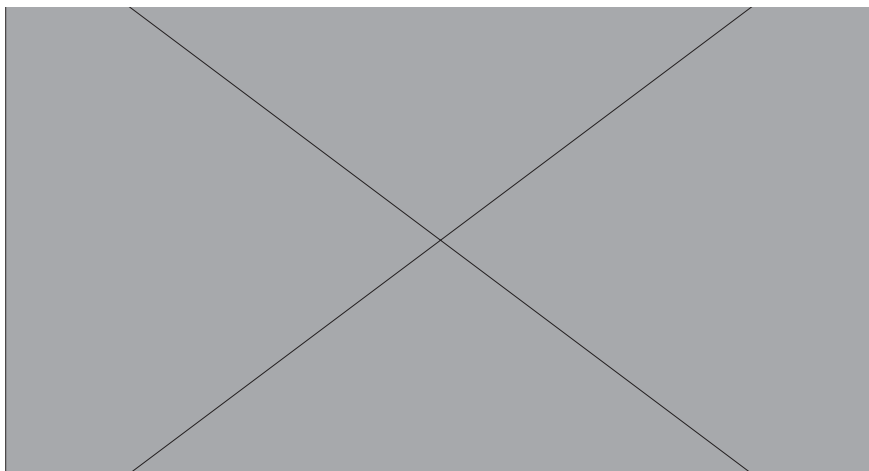


Photo 7: Middelfart Public Library, photo: H. Niegaard.

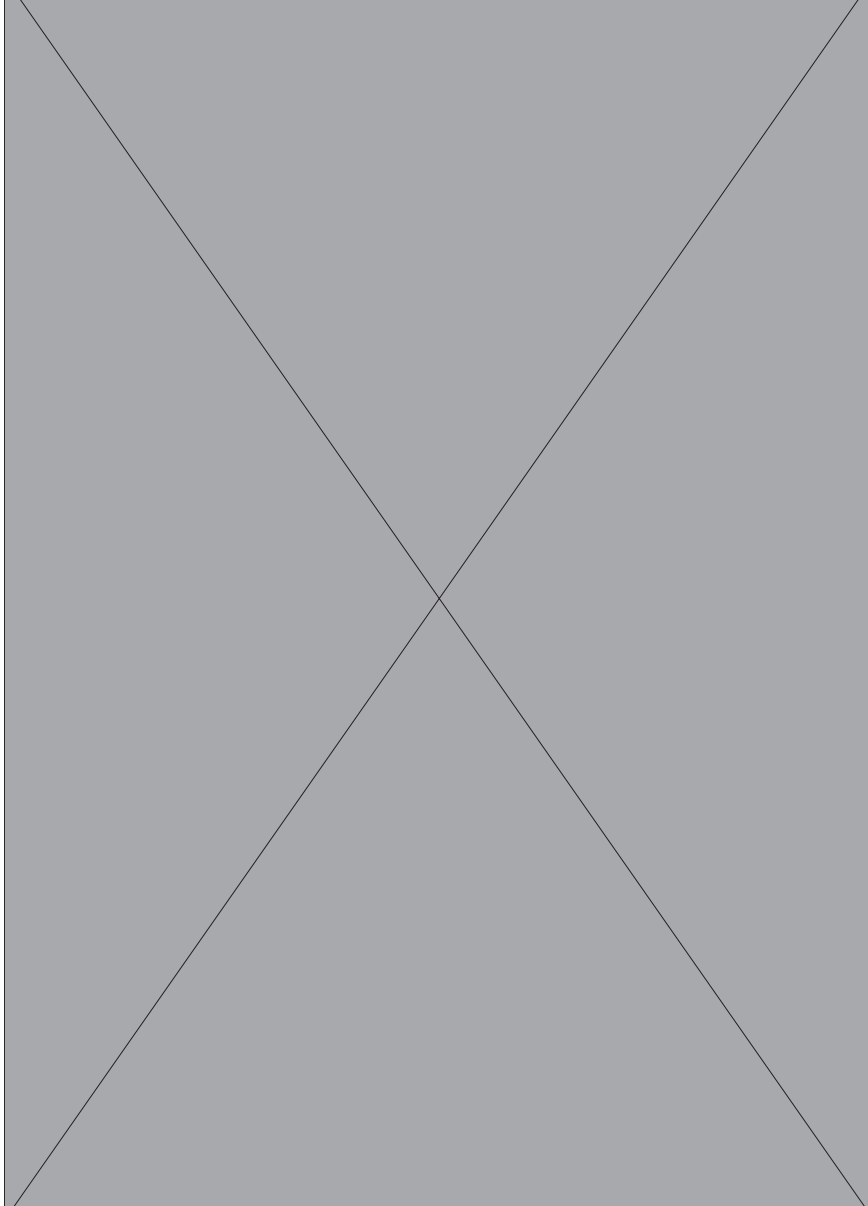


Photo 8: Kolding Public Library, photo: H. Niegaard.

ma screens for subject-related presentation, films etc. makes for the first time in a Danish public library a serious attempt to visualise digital resources, film and TV and stresses at the same time interactivity and learning by its many info stands and work facilities. Also known for its Public-Private-Partnership arrangements. Extent: 7,500 m². [9]

Hjørring Library is situated in the central shopping mall named Metropol. It was opened in 2008. The Metropol complex is designed by Schmidt, Hammer and Lassen Architects while Bosch & Fjord, interior architects, have designed the very attractive interior layout. Including an anarchistic Red Tape, a range of very colourful, inviting seating shapes and pleasant classic library features – promoting experience, learning,

5.7
Hjørring Library
in the Metropol,
or The Danish
Experience Library

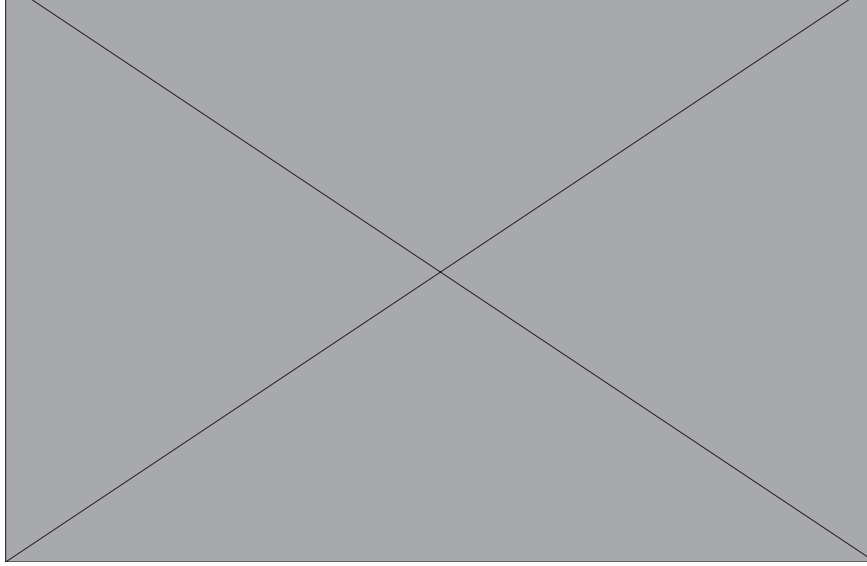


Photo 9: Hjørring Library, photo: Bosch & Fjord.

play and contemplation. The Red Tape is running here and there and everywhere taking the users around the library while at the same time offering exhibition space etc. Extent: 5,000 m². [10]

5.8 Multimedia House, Århus (2014 – opening 2015) The vision: The Multimedia House should be a flexible and dynamic sanctuary for everyone in search of knowledge, inspiration and personal development; the attractive library is the core of the house offering a diversity of media. It is an open, interactive and accessible learning environment supporting democracy and unity. The Multimedia House will furthermore house Citizens' Services and a number of networks and partners. Extent: 18,000 m² – library purposes and 10,000 m² optional area on a future harbour bastion. New urban spaces should be designed on the bastion around MEDIASPACE, while car parking, local trains, arrivals centre etc. should be established in the bastion or in connection hereto. [11]

6 Why invest in library buildings right now? To guarantee citizens and patrons an up-to-date and satisfactory library service in The Knowledge Society. Combining the physical and the online library. And because a set of more or less universal conditions emphasizes the growing need for either new buildings or redesign of existing building lay-out in order to provide an efficient and satisfactory library economy. They are:

- Users' behaviour and the use of the library as a meeting and work place, including the desire to use the library's physical localities – without necessarily borrowing material,
- the need to make the user self-sufficient through self-service solutions not just in the case of borrowing and returning material but also in the case of searching and retrieving relevant information and media,
- the task of integrating digital media and virtual services in the physical library's communication,
- a backlog in organising the library related to the change from manual task management to the automation of more and more tasks in practical performance during the last ten years,

- library service and space for children has to be adjusted concurrently with the media habits of children and young people,
- experiences, joy of reading, digital access and information literacy should be consciously and attractively supported in any library space.

This chapter provides an introduction to libraries in the 21st century and inspiration to the process of planning and designing library buildings matching current developments. It is based on reflections and extracts from two publications:

[1] Latimer, K. & Niegaard, H. (eds.) (2007). IFLA Library Building Guidelines: Developments & Reflections. Munich: Saur.

[2] Lauridsen, J., Niegaard, H. & Schulz, K. (eds.) (2008). Inspiration til bygning og indretning. Copenhagen: Danmarks Biblioteksforenings Forlag.

[3] Biblioteksvagten.dk. <http://www.biblioteksvagten.dk>.

[4] Det Kongelige Bibliotek. <http://www.kb.dk>.

[5] CBS – Copenhagen Business School. <http://www.cbs.dk/bibliotek>.

[6] Næstvedbibliotekerne. <http://www.naesbib.dk>.

[7] Nærum Gymnasium: Plads til dine muligheder. <http://www.nagym.dk>.

[8] Middelfart Bibliotek. <http://www.middelfartbibliotek.dk>.

[9] Koldingbibliotekerne. <http://www.koldingbibliotekerne.dk>.

[10] Hjørring Kommune. <http://www.Hjørring.dk>.

[11] Forsiden – Multimediehuset. <http://www.multimediehuset.dk>.

The cited internet sources have been last checked on January 7th, 2009.

References

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Photo 10: Interactive information project activities – on the road to the Multimedia House, Århus, photo: ÅKB.

